

Benefits of Bicycling

The positive consequences of biking as a healthy mode of transportation, or as a purely recreational activity, span across many aspects of our lives. They can be expressed in terms of the health of the environment (and resulting health of all living things), as well as the health of individuals who are more physically active. A transportation system that is conducive to bicycling can reap many benefits in terms of reduced traffic congestion and improved quality of life. Economic rewards both to the individual and to society are also realized through reduced health care costs and reduced dependency on auto ownership (and the resulting insurance and maintenance costs). There are also other economic benefits of bicycling that are more difficult to measure, such as the increased economic vitality of communities that have emphasized bicycle mobility. Finally, bikeable communities create a more equitable society that provides transportation choice for all citizens.

Health Benefits

No matter what your experience with cycling is, riding a bike can be a great way to get healthy exercise.

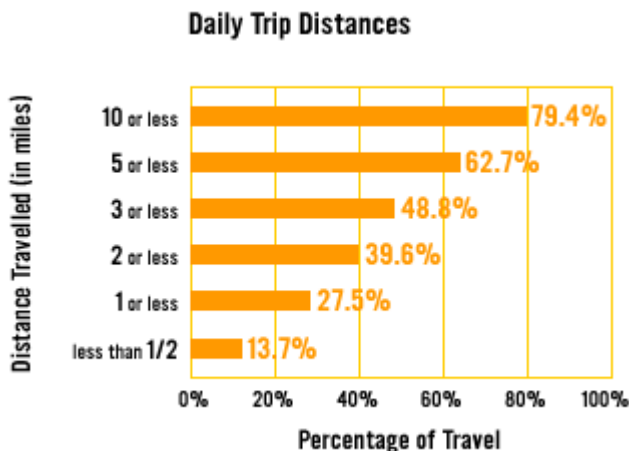
The issue of physical activity has never been more important than now. An alarming number of Americans are becoming more sedentary and obese and, consequently, are putting their lives at risk, reports the Centers for Disease Control. Even small increases in light to moderate activity will produce measurable benefits among those who are least active. Engaging in light to moderate physical activity reduces the risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, and other chronic and life-threatening illnesses. Physical activity can also improve mental health and even lower health care costs.

Older adults can also benefit from bicycling. Regular exercise provides myriad health benefits for senior adults including a stronger heart, a positive mental outlook, and an increased chance of remaining indefinitely independent—a benefit that will become increasingly important as our population ages in the coming years.

Transportation Benefits

Many of the trips that Americans make every day are short enough to be accomplished on a bicycle. The 1995 National Personal Transportation Survey (NPTS) found that approximately 40 percent of all trips are less than two miles in length—which represents about a 10-minute bike ride.

Bicycling can help to reduce roadway congestion. Many streets and highways carry more traffic than they were designed to handle, resulting in gridlock, wasted time and energy, pollution, and driver frustration. Bicycling requires significantly less space per traveler than driving. Roadway improvements to accommodate bicyclists can also enhance safety for motorists. For example, adding paved shoulders on two-lane roads has been shown to reduce the frequency of run-off-road, head-on, and sideswipe motor vehicle crashes.



Travel facts

- One in 12 U.S. households does not own an automobile (2001 NHTS).
- Approximately 12 percent of persons 15 or older do not drive (2001 NHTS).
- There are 9 million bike trips in the U.S. everyday (2001 NHTS).
- About 40 percent of all trips are shorter than two miles-a 30-minute walk or a 10-minute bike ride (1995 NPTS).

Environmental Benefits

Motor vehicles create a substantial amount of air pollution. In fact, according to the EPA, transportation is responsible for nearly 80 percent of carbon monoxide and 55 percent of nitrogen oxide emissions in the U.S. Not surprisingly, many metropolitan areas do not meet the air quality standards specified in the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments. Although individual cars are much cleaner today than they were in earlier years, if total traffic continues to grow, overall air quality will deteriorate. Moreover, every day cars and trucks burn millions of barrels of oil, a non-renewable energy source. Switching motor vehicle trips over to bicycle trips is an easy way to reduce energy needs and pollution emissions from the transportation sector.

Pollution facts

- Motor vehicle emissions represent 31 percent of total carbon dioxide, 81 percent of carbon monoxide, and 49 percent of nitrogen oxides released in the U.S. (The Green Commuter, A Publication of the Clean Air Council).
- 60 percent of the pollution created by automobile emissions happens in the first few minutes of operation, before pollution control devices can work effectively. Since "cold

starts" create high levels of emissions, shorter car trips are more polluting on a per-mile basis than longer trips (League of American Bicyclists).

- A short, four-mile round trip by bicycle keeps about 15 pounds of pollutants out of the air we breathe (WorldWatch Institute).

Economic Benefits

Bicycling is an affordable form of transportation. Car ownership is expensive, and consumes a major portion of many Americans' income. When safe facilities are provided for bicyclists, people can ride more and spend less on transportation, meaning they have more money to save or spend on other things.

Money facts

- The cost of operating a sedan for one year is approximately \$7,800 (AAA, Your Driving Costs).
- According to 2004 data from AAA estimates and US Census surveys, ownership of one motor vehicle accounts for more than 18 percent of a typical household's income.
- The cost of operating a bicycle for a year is only \$120 (League of American Bicyclists).

Quality of Life Benefits

Better conditions for bicycling have intangible benefits to the quality of life in cities and towns. The number of people bicycling can be a good indicator of a community's livability—a factor that has a profound impact on attracting businesses and workers as well as tourism.

Comfortable and connected bicycle environments offer alternatives to personal vehicles and increase opportunities for social contact with others. By providing appropriate bicycle and pedestrian facilities and amenities, communities enable the interaction between neighbors and other citizens that can strengthen relationships and contribute to a healthy sense of identity and place.